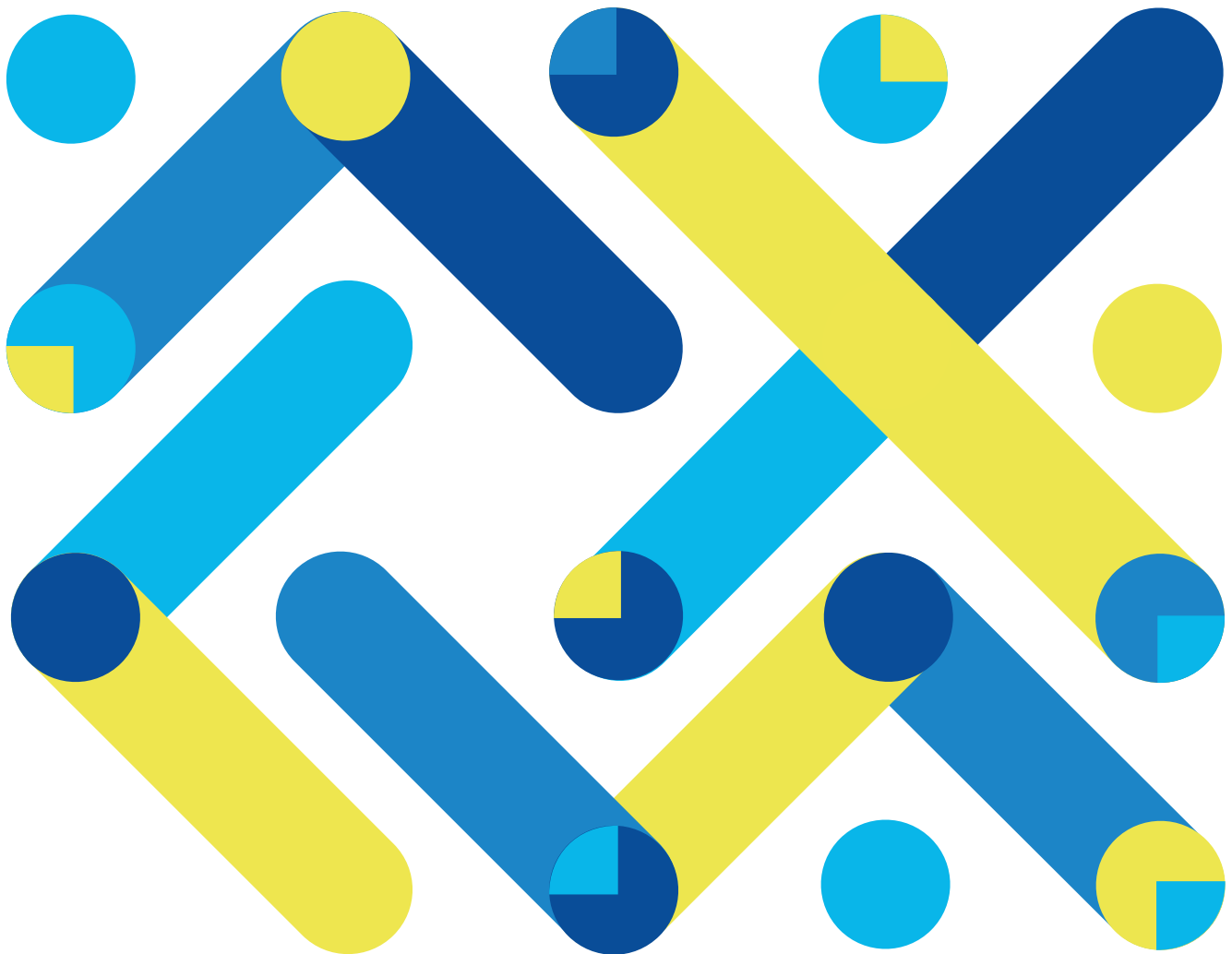


# The future of higher education: priorities and opportunities within the EHEA and at a global level

IN-GLOBAL - TPG-LRC CoRE Final conference



This document was developed within the project "Enhancing Knowledge of the EHEA and Global Dialogue" (IN-GLOBAL), which aims at improving knowledge sharing within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and at enhancing Global Dialogue on Higher Education policy, through supporting the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community in its activities and the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue.

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# The future of higher education: priorities and opportunities within the EHEA and at a global level

IN-GLOBAL - TPG-LRC CoRE Final conference



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## Context of the conference

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The conference “The future of higher education: priorities and opportunities within the EHEA and at a global level” was held in Rome on 19 February 2025, and organised in the framework of the projects TPG-LRC Constructing Recognition in the EHEA ([TPG-LRC CoRE](#)) and Enhancing Internal Knowledge and Global Dialogue of the EHEA ([IN-GLOBAL](#)), co-funded by European Union (EU) under the Erasmus+ programme. The main aim of these projects was to support the institutional activities of three working structures of the [Bologna Follow-Up Group](#) (BFUG), respectively, namely the [Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention](#) (TPG B on LRC), the [Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue](#) (CG GPD) and the [Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing](#).

The main goal of the final conference was to facilitate reflections on the future of higher education, both from the regional and the global perspective, highlighting main common opportunities and priorities to work on. Furthermore, by sharing the main results of the TPG-LRC CoRE and IN-GLOBAL projects the final conference aimed to support the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to strengthen dialogue with other macro-regions of the world.

The event saw the contribution of high-level speakers and was open to the members of relevant BFUG working structures, projects’ partners, HEI representatives and other relevant stakeholders.

## From the Rome to the Tirana Communiqué. State of the art and future perspectives.

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Chiara Finocchietti  
*CIMEA, Italy*

The *fil rouge* that underpins the conference can be described following two main paths “the **peer support approach** (TPG-LRC CoRE) to support the implementation of the LRC within EHEA and the promotion of **dialogue between the EHEA and the other macro-regions** of the world (IN-GLOBAL)”.



The focus of the conference is on:

- presenting the results of both projects: supporting the implementation of the Bologna key commitments within EHEA countries, and how to promote the internationalisation of higher education by enhancing dialogue and cooperation at a global level.
- Reviewing the progress made from the Rome Communiqué to the Tirana Communiqué, highlighting the achievements of the previous mandate.
- Building upon the work accomplished during the last mandate of the TPG B on LRC and the CG GPD (2021-2024) to outline future directions for the ongoing mandate (2024-2027), in preparation for the next Ministerial Conference in 2027 (Iași – Chișinău).
- Facilitating reflections on the future of higher education, both from the regional and the global perspective, highlighting main common opportunities and priorities to work on.

“*Today’s aim is to feed the dialogue with other regions and to facilitate the dialogue among the groups.*”

Chiara Finocchietti

**Keynote speech**

# The future of higher education in a global perspective<sup>1</sup>

**Hilligje van't Land**  
*International Association  
of Universities*

I am honoured to have been invited by Chiara Finocchietti, Director of CIMEA-NARIC Italy, and the CIMEA team, to speak to this esteemed audience today. If the main aim of this encounter is to share the [TPG-LRC CoRE](#) and [IN-GLOBAL](#) project results to support the implementation of the LRC within the EHEA and to promote dialogue between the Bologna process and other macro-regions of the world, I am pleased to have been invited to speak to the quite challenging topic of where higher education is heading in the years to come and to suggest some avenues for reflection to complement regional perspectives with a global one.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this text was prepared for an oral presentation at this Conference. It should be read with that in mind. Hope is that, by sharing it on the conference webpage, it will trigger further thought and reflection. I would be pleased to receive comments and suggestions that would help improve the narrative [contact [h.vantland\(@\)iau-aiu.net](mailto:h.vantland(@)iau-aiu.net)].

## Preamble

John Brennan, Emeritus Professor, Open University, UK<sup>2</sup> recently wrote that “Generally speaking Universities have become businesses” and asks if “they can also remain universities”. He asks the question about the definition of what a university actually is and what its roles are or should be.

On another note, when speaking to a group of students in France recently, I was told that according to what they experience, and to their regret, universities function more like ‘knowledge reproduction’ institutions and less as places where knowledge is acquired with the aim to foster critical dialogue and reflection on key societal questions. To them, universities are not places where knowledge is unpacked and analysed to lead to new thought and innovation.

These two more ‘anecdotal’ perceptions question the value of higher education and its role today and for tomorrow.

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To try and share some avenues as to what the university should be rather than what it will be, I will use and apply some future thinking techniques borrowed/ adapted or inspired in part from the following initiatives:

- the outputs of and follow up events to the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative.
- The OECD - CERI ‘Trends Shaping Education 2025’ published in January.
- The Bologna process (punctuated by the Paris, Rome and Tirana communiqués).
- Debates fostered by the [IAU](#) over the years, in particular at [IAU International Conferences](#)

I will start with the Bologna process Ministerial Communiqués. These identify gaps in education and higher education systems, urging action to address them. The Paris (2018) communiqué emphasised support for vulnerable and underrepresented groups in accessing and excelling in higher education, aligning with the EU’s goal of creating a European Education Area, initially by 2025 with the aim to promote mobility and academic recognition for all EU citizens.

In Rome in 2020, Ministers committed to an inclusive, innovative, and interconnected European Higher Education Area (EHEA), this time by 2030. The EHEA is meant to offer equitable access to education, introduce innovative teaching methods, and enhance international cooperation and mobility. HEIs are seen as key to driving change in sustainability and societal contributions, preparing students for new and green jobs and supporting lifelong learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-brennan-082109144/?originalSubdomain=uk>

In Tirana (2024), ministers reaffirmed these goals, emphasising that HEIs should promote critical thinking, tolerance, and science-based dialogue. They also stressed the importance of protecting fundamental values like academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the participation of students and staff in governance.

These ambitious commitments face significant challenges. The question arises: Is the transformation outlined in the Bologna process achievable by 2030; will longer term planning with a deadline by 2050, similar to deadlines used for strategies developed in African, Latin American or global higher education initiatives, be needed?

The latter is probably true given the challenges society and the education sector face today. Indeed, if we all agree that we live in a world interconnected as never before, with new development opportunities, we also live in a world in which global megatrends are reshaping societies at a faster pace than ever, profoundly impacting higher education. **Universities have no choice but to embrace future thinking to try and anticipate disruptions, foster resilience, and adapt to rapid social, economic, and technological shifts.** They are said to provide quality education, undertake research, engage with communities foster citizenship and prepare for the world of work.



*Universities have no choice but to embrace future thinking to try and anticipate disruptions, foster resilience, and adapt to rapid social, economic, and technological shifts.*

*Hilligje van't Land*



Geopolitical tensions, climate change, and social inequalities are driving political polarisation and economic uncertainty, influencing students' educational and career choices. HEIs have to play a critical role in equipping students with the knowledge and skills to navigate these challenges while fostering social cohesion, critical thinking, and global awareness and thus to challenge the orientations imposed somehow by some of the geopolitical tensions.

At the same time, technological advancements – including AI, virtual reality, and automation - are transforming education and the workforce. Universities are constantly called to rethink curricula to balance foundational knowledge with lifelong learning and adaptability. **As labour markets evolve, higher education must address skill gaps, diversify learning pathways, and integrate emerging technologies to enhance teaching, research, and collaboration.**

What's more, as stated in particular in the recent 2025 OECD-CERI Report, which presents and analyses trends shaping education today, “shifting societal values suggest that work is no longer a central identity marker for many young people. HEIs must explore how to prepare students for a world where human-AI collaboration is the norm, and where emotional intelligence, creativity, and ethical decision-making are as valuable as technical expertise.”

The OECD Report highlights the following fundamental questions<sup>3</sup>:

- Given the rapid pace of change, how to best combine the teaching of specific skills with that of broader competencies needed to continue learning throughout life, including metacognitive skills?
- How can education systems address both foundational and more complex sets of skills in a way that complements rather than compromises one for the other?
- And how can the education sector use technologies to optimize its own core processes?
- How radically will technological developments and sustainability imperatives impact the need for human labour and the way that humans interact with each other?
- While human relationships remain central to caring for others, new technologies have the potential to transform social interactions. With less time spent in direct human contact, can education help maintain a sense of community and foster socio-emotional learning and well-being?

These and other questions are some that the higher education sector is faced with on all continents. These and other questions call on university leaders, academics and students and staff to explore alternative futures with an open mind, and adapt questions, scenarios and thinking tools to support constructive stakeholder debates and forward-looking education policies in order for education to shape the future and not only the other way around.

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2025), Trends Shaping Education 2025, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ee6587fd-en>, page 9.

Like the research presented in the OECD Report, UNESCO also envisions a future where higher education is the driving force for sustainable development, social justice and global citizenship, preparing learners to navigate in and contribute to an increasingly complex world. UNESCO calls on higher education leaders to actively engage with alternative futures, ensuring that institutions remain dynamic, relevant, and responsive to global change. The postulate being that by fostering innovation, inclusivity, and interdisciplinary thinking, universities can help shape a more equitable and sustainable future. The [2021 Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, 'Reimagining Our Futures Together'](#), argue that HEIs should be active in every aspect of building a new social contract for education.

Yet, while higher education is already undergoing dramatic changes, from growing enrolments to increasing internationalisation and rapid digitalisation, many structural inequalities persist, such as limited flexibility and relevance, insufficient financing and limited access for vulnerable groups. In many contexts, on all continents, academic freedom is being put to the test and increased marketisation is threatening the capacity for universities to educate well rounded citizens and increases competition rather than intellectual cooperation.

**Reimagining the futures of higher education and exploring how to orchestrate alternative futures is a necessity and requires positively constructive imagination of what that could look like.**

Building on the UNESCO Futures of Education Report, the **roadmap presented at the UNESCO 2022 World Higher Education Conference (WHEC 2022)**, '[Beyond limits: new ways to reinvent higher education](#)', outlined key principles and transitions to reorient higher education to 2050 and beyond, with a focus on inclusion and diversity, a commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, and this time a strong call for inter and transdisciplinary and collaborative approaches.



*Reimagining the futures of higher education and exploring how to orchestrate alternative futures is a necessity and requires positively constructive imagination of what that could look like.*

Hilligje van't Land



The UNESCO 2021 Report, the 2022 Roadmap, the OECD Report and the recent IAU International Conference in Puebla “[Transforming higher education for the future](#)”, Dublin, “[Relevance and Value of Universities to Future Society](#)”, Qatar, “[Higher Education with Impact: The Importance of Intercultural Learning and Dialogue](#)”, and Tokyo, “[University Values in a Changing World](#)”, stress a strong need to redefine and affirm the values upon which to develop education including higher education. Researchers and speakers from around the world stressed that if a new social contract for education is to be imagined and implemented it should be based on a human rights approach, including the freedom to think, to develop academic and critical thinking, of conscience and of expression. It should lead to respect of diversity, difference and multiperspectivity. And all agree on saying that for higher education to become more meaningful in the future it needs to be based on collaboration rather than on competition.

That said, “the Future, in fact, is already here”, and the development of new forms and types of education, together with all stakeholders including students and staff, has started. A strong commitment by all stakeholders and in particular by governments will be essential.

But trust in democratic institutions including schools and universities declines. These spaces of learning and research which are to serve as spaces for dialogue, promoting civic engagement and interdisciplinary solutions to pressing global issues are challenged in the delivery of this promise even financially.

Indeed, we see education budgets from pre-primary to lifelong learning through higher education being cut as never before – maybe less so in Asia still, along with an increasing development of non-regulated privatisation of education and higher education; we may ask ourselves if politicians really are serious about the future. Do they still see and undersign the goals set for education and, as a consequence, for the world we need and want?

Will universities and the higher education sector as a whole have the capacity to address

1. the tension between ‘simple’ modernisation versus true transformation which calls for a delicate balancing act between what we want to transform and what needs to be kept;
2. the call for global solutions and the need for local rooting;
3. the tension between the need for innovation and risk avoidance in a context of protection versus innovation at the same time;
4. the tension between competing economic investments governments have to make in a tense geopolitical context where education is far from being seen as the priority?

## **Foresight-oriented key questions – what then to say about the future of HE from a global perspective?**

### **The Future of Higher Education Systems and Institutions: let's take 2050 as timeframe.**

On paper, most research and initiatives consulted seem to align and say that, by 2050, higher education (HE) systems and institutions should have transformed into dynamic entities addressing global challenges while maintaining strong ties to local contexts. This will require to regularly redefine their purpose, methods, and societal role. Driven by technological innovation and globalisation, HE should navigate persistent inequalities and embrace a vision of equity, innovation, and lifelong learning. To do this, it will need strong support politically, socially and financially.

### **Technological Integration and Hybrid Learning.**

Technology will fundamentally reshape HE by 2050 or even before. By then, traditional classrooms will probably give way to flexible, hybrid learning environments combining advanced algorithms, high-quality content, and self-directed study with essential mentorship from educators. Personalised education will replace curricula as we know it today, fostering the much-needed interdisciplinary learning and catering to individual student interests. Teachers and professors will have an increasingly important and complex task to educate the next generations in making sense of all the information that is being shared around the world as well. Such a model should create globally connected yet locally relevant learning spaces, expanding access and enriching the educational experience.

### **This calls for a strong Commitment to Quality and Lifelong Learning**

Rising education costs, decreasing financial support and persistent inequalities should compel Ministries of education and higher education together with HE institutions to focus on quality, accessibility, and collaboration. Countering trends toward privatisation, universities should offer shared courses and customizable degree pathways, ensuring affordability and inclusivity. Collaboration instead of competition among institutions will enable lesser-known universities with strong teaching and research capabilities to thrive alongside prestigious ones.

Moreover, universities will extend their mission to lifelong learning, offering continuous education to alumni and a global community of learners. This will prepare individuals to adapt to evolving personal and professional demands while fostering global citizenship.

### **The 2050 University: A Vision of Excellence and Equity**

By 2050, HE institutions should develop into centres of excellence in teaching, research, and societal engagement and recognised as such by humanity. They should democratise



education, offering lifelong learning opportunities to diverse populations. Through global networks, these institutions will empower individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to thrive in an interconnected, rapidly evolving world.

### **Ethics and Humanity in a Digital Age**

The rapid integration of technology into HE also poses risks, including diminished human interaction, privacy concerns, and threats to cultural identities. To counterbalance these challenges, HE institutions of the future will have to continue to prioritize ethical guidelines, mental well-being, and human-centric education. Emphasising real human connections and ethical considerations will ensure that technological advances support, rather than undermine, the human experience.

In essence, the HE systems of 2050 should embody innovation, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility. They should commit and be enabled to serve as transformative forces for equity and progress, addressing the world's most pressing challenges while cultivating empowered, globally conscious individuals.

### **What Strategies for Transforming Higher Education by 2050?**

To realize the vision for HE systems by 2050, a comprehensive approach addressing inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability is essential.

#### **1. Foster Collaboration and Alliances**

HEIs must be empowered to combat polarisation and isolationism, fostering global partnerships through joint degree programs, cross-border research, and shared funding. The European University Alliances are a step in this direction, with similar initiatives emerging in regions like Southern Africa, but a global movement is still lacking.

Public-private collaborations should align research with practical applications, while universities maintain control over intellectual property. Staff assessments need to evolve, and commercial publishers are called to embrace the Open Science movement. Interdisciplinarity should be supported to help students address global challenges like sustainability.

Foreign interference in research and innovation is a growing concern, with increasing guidelines from the EU, North America, and Asia. The [EU's "Economic Security Package"](#) emphasises the need for monitoring outbound research investments and clarifying dual-use research. These issues represent new challenges for universities, making academic input crucial.

To address global issues like climate change and pandemics, international collaboration in research is essential. The EU's "As open as possible, as restricted as necessary" approach requires universities to balance openness with security while preserving academic freedom

and autonomy. A delicate balancing act with regards to academic freedom and university autonomy.

Universities should lead in developing strategies to combat threats to research and promote responsible, open collaboration. Ministries of education should encourage global scientific partnerships based on principles like academic freedom, research integrity, ethics, open science, and gender equality.

## **2. Call for Increased Investment and Policy Support**

Instead of reducing education budgets, governments should prioritize funding for education to foster modernisation and resilience. By incentivising innovative teaching and research models, progress can be driven, supported by global governance frameworks that promote collaboration. To meet evolving expectations, academics will require strong support to adapt to their new roles. As Derek Bok, former President of Harvard University, and Ann Landers, a popular columnist in the 1950s, once said, “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.” Indeed, the cost of ignorance could ultimately be far more threatening for the very future of our world.

This will help:

## **3. Enhance Accessibility and Inclusivity**

Reducing financial barriers is key, requiring investments in affordable education, scholarships, and targeted funding for marginalised groups. Technology must enable equitable access, including assistive tools for learners with special needs. We would need zero rate education technology. Tailored education models reflecting local cultures and economies will ensure inclusivity. This said, yesterday’s headline of online magazine Inside Higher Ed [February 18, 2025] reads as follows: [“After the Sweeping Anti-DEI Guidance, What Should Colleges Do?”](#) “The Education Department issued a surprise letter over the weekend vastly expanding the scope of the Supreme Court’s affirmative action ban. As the dust settles, institutions must decide how to respond—and whether to fight back.” The issue is that the US president’s attitude disinhibits similar attitudes which sweep across the world at an unexpected speed and what will come next is hard to predict.

## **4. Redesign Curricula for Future Skills and Competences**

Interdisciplinary programs integrating humanities, a creative mix between STEM and the arts will nurture critical thinking and problem-solving. Courses and the professors who develop and teach them have the complex task to address global challenges like sustainability and ethics, while modular, flexible lifelong learning models will adapt to evolving needs.

## **5. Leverage Technology Thoughtfully**

Robust online and hybrid platforms, alongside AI-powered adaptive learning tools, can personalise education and foster self-paced progress yet critical approaches are needed. Strong cybersecurity measures will help ensure data privacy and safety in digital environments for staff and students as well.

## **6. Build Ethical and Human-Centred Institutions**

Ethical frameworks must guide technology use, promoting inclusion and mental well-being. Comprehensive mental health resources and initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity will reinforce a human-centred approach.

## **7. Encourage Institutional Flexibility**

Modular accreditation systems will let students combine credits from multiple institutions for personalised degrees. Skill-oriented, outcome-based evaluations will likely replace rigid assessments - the assessment of students will indeed need to change.

## **8. Engage Alumni and Lifelong Learners**

Lifelong learning platforms will keep alumni connected through advanced courses and certifications. Alumni mentorship programs can foster intergenerational learning and professional growth.

## **9. Promote Sustainability and Responsibility**

A Whole of Institution approach to SD, including the development of green campuses and research on renewable energy and climate change but not only, will embed sustainability into all HE practices. Here as well SD activities are hit hard by political and financial decisions around the world. Too often, SD initiatives are still considered as a cost rather than an investment and when HE budgets are cut so are financial commitment to change management and reorientations towards SD.

Yet it is by implementing the afore-mentioned strategies, HE institutions – a key component of the education continuum – can transform into inclusive, innovative, and adaptable forces that empower individuals and address global challenges by 2050.

### **In conclusion**

The university of the future will be one that will need careful co-construction locally, nationally and internationally and for the common good. It will require adequate funding, but too many see investing in HE as a cost and not an investment.

Former President of South Africa and Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." By that he meant in particular that it can contribute to nation building and reconstruction of a better world.

Higher education is the corner stone for building the future we want. The Bologna process is a process that does support these ideals; other development strategies are being developed on all continents to support different yet comparable ideals.

Global dialogue and collaboration will help mutual reinforcement of these dynamics and help education deliver on its powerful promises.

*Thank you for your attention.*



*Education is the most powerful weapon which you  
can use to change the world.*

*Nelson Mandela*







# How projects support the implementation of the Bologna Process

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**Stefania Frassanito**

*European Education and Culture  
Executive Agency (EACEA),  
European Commission*

The European Commission has supported so far the implementation of the Bologna Process through funded projects.

The **shared priorities** of the Erasmus+ programme and the Bologna Process imply the “mobility of students and staff and the cooperation between institutions, the internationalisation and global engagement in higher education, the higher education quality and relevance enhancement, the fostering of employability and entrepreneurship, the promotion of social inclusion and equity, degree recognition and accreditation, digitalisation and online learning, as well as sustainability and climate awareness”.



Among the **main joint achievements**, it is possible to identify the networking and capacity-building activities, the creation of tools for self-assessment and needs analysis, the contribution to policies in higher education at all levels, and the implementation of resources for policymakers, institutions, educators and administrators.

“As a **tangible impact** of projects an increased capacity of national authorities, HEIs and other relevant actors, enhanced frameworks for transnational cooperation in higher education and changes in legislation and national higher education policies”.

Ursula von der Leyen, in the message included in the Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029, said: “We will strengthen Erasmus+ [...] so that more people can benefit. This is key for people to develop skills and create shared experiences and a better understanding of each other”.

*“We will strengthen Erasmus+ so that more people can benefit. This is key for people to develop skills and create shared experiences and a better understanding of each other”*

*Ursula von der Leyen*

## The experience of the TPG-LRC CoRE and IN-GLOBAL projects: results and way forward

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**Elisa Petrucci**

*CIMEA, Italy*

How have the TPG LRC CoRE and the IN-GLOBAL projects complemented the institutional activities of three working structure of the Bologna Follow Up Group?

Each project **was based on one main principle** that was implemented at different levels and from different perspectives:

For the **TPGLRC Core**, the underpinning principle was **peer support**, which was employed in different ways to implement activities aimed at:

- supporting the institutional activity of the Thematic Peer Group B on the LRC.
- Fostering cooperation among different actors in higher education at the national level.





- Conducting research and publishing works to crystallize the group's efforts and support its reflection.

For the **IN-GLOBAL** project, the core principle was to **consolidate dialogue and trust both within the EHEA and with other macro-regions**. Similarly to the TPG-LRC CoRE project, IN-GLOBAL contributed to the institutional activities of the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue and the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing. Additionally, the project produced studies to inform the decisions of the groups, and a third set of activities focused on enhancing cooperation within and beyond the EHEA.

The work carried out by both project consortia was presented, including the promotion of dialogue and trust among all actors involved, the preparation of studies to inform groups' decisions, in the perspective of strengthening cooperation within EHEA and with other regions of the world, in the case of the IN-GLOBAL project.

The projects results, are available on the dedicated project websites, IN-GLOBAL and TPG-LRC CoRE, which gathers publications, as well as tools realised in the framework of project activities.

*The pathway forward consists in promoting synergies among different BFUG working structures, as well to enhance vertical and horizontal cooperation. This is something that activities under Erasmus+ projects can really facilitate.*

Elisa Petrucci

Panel discussion

# Intergovernmental Cooperation areas in Higher Education: lessons learnt, space for synergies and future perspectives

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**Luca Lantero**

*for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*

**Rauza Mendaliyeva**

*for the Central-Asia Higher Education Area (CAHEA)*

**Supansa Kajavong**

*for the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education*

**Elizabeth Bernal Gamboa**

*for the Latin American and Caribbean Space for Higher Education (ENLACES)*

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*Session chaired by*

**Noah Sobe**

*UNESCO*

The session involved representatives from the four intergovernmental cooperation areas in higher education and was structured in an interview-based format, with two rounds of questions.

### **How was the intergovernmental cooperation area you represent established and what were the initial objectives?**

The EHEA was the first intergovernmental area to be established in 1999. The “Bologna process”, was born with the idea of harmonizing the different higher education systems at the European level. A specific focus was made on the key commitment 2 related to the implementation of the LRC in the EHEA, as a pillar of the area regarding recognition. “Why is the LRC, drafted in 1987, still so actual today? If we look at the text, there are no words such as transnational education, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, etc. The fact that the LRC is based on general principles, makes this Convention a relevant text at a distance of years”.

CAHEA was established in 2021 with the Turkestan Declaration, with the aim of attracting international students, expand educational projects and meet global standards. “Kazakhstan is to become an educational hub in Central Asia”.

The Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education was originally established in 2008, with the proposal by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) to the SEAMEO Council Conference, to support regional integration through the harmonisation of higher education in the region.

The areas of higher education policy harmonisation included:

- the establishment of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN).
- The piloting of an intra-regional student mobility programme, currently the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme.
- Leadership Development Programme.
- E-learning and mobile learning.
- ASEAN Research Clusters, which led to the creation of the ASEAN Citation Index.

The Latin American and Caribbean Space for Higher Education (ENLACES) “was created with the aim of strengthening education and social development of the countries that are part of it, based on the need of strong collaboration among them”. The area was established in

2008, following the Mexico City guidelines. This area is based on dialogue in response to educational challenges, especially promoting cooperation among institutions, international organisations and stakeholders. “During these years we strengthened shared values and standards among different countries in the field of education, as well as working to support mutual recognition of studies and diplomas and to promote shared guidelines for HEIs, to establish communication tools to promote education and learning; to strengthen language learning in the region to reinforce integration in the region and exchange”.

### **What objectives have been achieved and what could be the main objectives to work on in cooperation with other regions?**

Referring to the perspective of ENLACES, it was mentioned that “over the years we made some progress but were limited by financial issues and governmental changes. One achievement was the document of the 3<sup>rd</sup> intergovernmental conference of LAC countries, in which 11 points were reached to work on<sup>4</sup>; we committed to reinforce cooperation with other regions towards well-being and education, horizontal research and innovation by having a clear programmatic perspective, creating strategic alliances for HE supported by the International Accreditation Organisation (IAO) and UNESCO IESALC. In this sense, we believe that cooperation with other regions can be generated by innovation and digitalisation, academic mobility and inclusivity”. The objectives of the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education are an ongoing process where progress should be maintained, and functions adapted to remain relevant. With the recent disruptions, the Common Space has been revisited and the ASEAN-SEAMEO Joint Declaration was adopted by the Ministers of Education in 2024. The Declaration is focused on the creation of an inclusive space of collective intelligence for sustainable learning and living, with key principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). The recent development solidified the partnership between ASEAN and SEAMEO RIHED – two intergovernmental organisations with mandates in higher education in the region – laying the foundation for deeper collaboration and broader impact. The region also welcomes closer partnerships with other regions.

When talking about CAHEA, the experience of Kazakhstan was shared. The country ratified the LRC in 1997, and now has intergovernmental agreements with 45 countries. “In 2010 Kazakhstan joined the Bologna process and we have implemented almost all parameters.

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<sup>4</sup> Declaration of the III Regional Conference on Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018. URL: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000376753>

Afterwards, Kazakhstan has led the construction of CAHEA and is currently working on building educational hubs in Central Asia to implement Bologna values in HEIs. HEIs should not be the place reproducing knowledge but the place to build science: our objectives are building knowledge in AI, climate change etc.”.

Talking about EHEA, “the real evolution is to speak about digital evolution, which is different from digitalisation, as it is related to creating a structure. Digital evolution can change the mentality, as it is the possibility given to us to discuss on how to run best our processes at national level”. “The etymology of *revolution* is to change the perspective, evolution is revolution. In CIMEA we have introduced a digital transformation unit. Also, CoE and UNESCO are working on digital transformation. The main challenge we have is to speak of digital evolution and transformation rather than digitalisation”.



Panel discussion

## Implementing fair recognition as a key commitment in international cooperation: dialogue among regional recognition conventions

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**Luca Lantero**

*President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee*

**Lamine Guèye**

*President of the Addis Convention Committee and Network of Implementation Structures*

**Dolly Seow-Ganesan**

*President of the Tokyo Convention Committee and Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC)*

**Gonzalo Baroni Boces**

*President of the Buenos Aires Convention Committee and Network of National Information Centres in Latin America and the Caribbean (CINALC)*

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*Session chaired by*

**Chiara Finocchietti**

*President of the ENIC Network*

The session was aimed at gathering the different regional perspectives from the Regional Recognition Conventions. The Presidents of the regional committees involved in the discussions were asked to **share what are the main priorities at regional level to foster fair recognition**.

Starting from the LRCC President, he expressed his appreciation for the ratification of the LRC by Greece, which marks an important point for higher education in Europe. As the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, the priority is to facilitate the access of the EU in the Convention, to support the implementation of automatic recognition and fair recognition. "Another priority at the moment is artificial intelligence". LRCC published a joint position paper on AI and recognition, which was made possible thanks to the convergence on the topic also between the Council of Europe (CoE) and UNESCO. This represents a very important step for the global dialogue.

The Addis convention was adopted in December 2014 and entered into force in December 2019. Currently it includes 15 State parties, out of the 54 that are part of the African continent. The President presented the context in which the Convention applies. African population constitutes 17% of global population with 70% of young people less than 30 years old. Employment is a priority in Africa, linked with the fast increase of student population, collecting about 10 million. The main objectives of the Addis Convention are promoting mobility and integration in African states, networking aimed at advancing SDG 4 for equitable access in education and higher education, establishing a legal framework for fair and transparent assessment of qualifications and fostering recognition between state parties. The current priorities among state parties, which are also shared with countries who are currently not parties of the Convention:

- develop legislatively favourable environments for the internationalisation of HE.
- Establish robust evaluation and QA systems (agencies, mechanisms and networks).
- Develop new government and management tools for readability of HE diplomas and frameworks (QF, information centres).
- Transparent evaluation of programmes and institutions (accreditation, equivalence and recognition).
- Advocacy for ratification of the Addis Convention.
- Information exchange and collaboration on transnational education with other regional conventions.



The President of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention shared with the audience that signatory parties to the Tokyo Convention are committed to implement fair and transparent and non-discriminatory mechanisms for recognition. “Fair recognition can only happen with accurate information, recognition and human-centred approach”. In a region as diverse as Asia-Pacific this is challenging, and there is the need to proactively build a strong community of practice and to easily verify authenticity of qualifications. Countering of education fraud emerges as a regional priority, as well. A strategic approach has been undertaken by developing a roadmap and action plan for the Tokyo Convention. Lastly, a plenary session for the state parties of the Tokyo Convention has taken place, to foster cooperation based on shared principles.

Finally, the perspective of the Latin-America and the Caribbean was shared by presenting the key priorities in three key areas:

- operation of CINALC: reinforce the national information centres in LAC that were funded in 2023, one of the main priorities is linked to facilitate recognition and mobility. The establishment of CINALC could enhance recognition and it was a turning point to share practices, enhance cross-border collaboration, by developing a regional database ensuring comparability.
- Capacity building initiatives, as fair recognition requires a well-prepared group of professionals across member states. This is done by: providing training programmes, organizing regional workshops, developing policy guidelines to be used as policy documents in particular cases, such as migration. An example of this is the publication on Venezuelan degrees and diplomas, which is a good tool to help migrants be integrated in education systems and labour markets.
- Development of digital tools to enhance recognition: this pillar focuses on leveraging digital technologies to foster recognition. We are implementing digital platforms, regional websites on national HE systems and accreditation procedures, regional diploma supplement based on international practices. This point is important as it will be instrumental in increasing the transparency of HE in different national contexts.

“Collaboration is the key to success, and this depends on trust among member states. By implementing these three areas we are taking strong steps towards implementation of fair recognition.”





Thematic workshop

# Quality assurance for a future-proof higher education system from the EHEA and global perspectives

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## **The experience of QA-fit project**

**Anna Gover**

*European Association for Quality  
Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*

## **Ensuring and enhancing the quality of recognition processes. Key considerations and recommendations**

**Helene Peterbauer**

*European University Association (EUA)*

## **Quality Assurance in the East African Common Higher Education Area**

**Michael Mawa**

*Inter-University Council for East-Africa  
(IUCEA)*

The session was aimed at sharing insights from the regional and global perspective on the topic of quality assurance (QA).

The aim of the [QA-fit project](#) (QA Fit for the Future) was to collect evidence for a potential revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Nonetheless, it was clarified that **QA is much more than the ESGs themselves**, as the work of each higher education institution and QA agency to support quality is more varied and articulated. Project results are based on both qualitative and quantitative research methods (surveys and focus groups), involving all main actors working to support QA. “ESGs are generally working. All stakeholders agree that we need a general set of standards to support student and staff mobility, recognition and quality culture. So, the basic principles remain relevant”. As there is the need to recognise the usefulness of existing frameworks, revisions are preferred to revolutions, building on current practice while allowing for flexible approaches. “We have to celebrate the diverse contexts and cultures in higher education, and we need to make room for flexibility: this requires common frameworks and reference points that allow for this diversity”. The results of the QA-fit project will feed into the ESG revision process, with the ESG steering group coordinating the whole process. After a consultation with stakeholders on the draft prepared by the ESG drafting group, the final version is expected to be approved by the BFUG in the autumn meeting in 2026, with final approval in the EHEA Ministerial conference in 2027.

The publication [“Ensuring and enhancing the quality of recognition processes. Key considerations and recommendations”](#) was launched in 2024, in the context of the TPG-LRC CoRE project. The document explores the quality of academic recognition procedures in the EHEA, which is a key factor supporting the realisation of automatic recognition. It understands the term “quality” in the context of recognition both as compliance with the LRC and as QA of recognition procedures, in line with the ESG.

Key considerations and recommendations of the study

- Upscale efforts to fully implement the LRC. This concerns in particular the need for approaches to implement Article VII of the LRC in a consistent and sustainable manner.
- Ensure better links between recognition and QA. This includes the need for a better understanding among staff dealing with recognition of the purpose of QA measures as being geared towards quality enhancement.
- Enhance support, cooperation and coordination between all stakeholders, especially in disseminating readily available tools that enhance the quality of recognition procedures.

The third presentation was devoted to the process of establishing the regional QA system in East Africa. The key activities were related to policy dialogue events, the development of a handbook for QA agencies and HEIs, capacity building activities to enhance QA in the region and a Network for QA practitioners. “The establishment of the system was recognised by the East African partner states. After many years of activities, the heads of state declared EAC a common HE Area. The main objective was to make the education systems in the region harmonised, coherent and comparable to the international level. This was to facilitate mobility of students, staff and professionals and mutual recognition of qualifications.

IUCEA is mandated to implement the declaration”. The five key elements on which EACHEA is based are:

1. Regional QA framework.
2. EA Qualifications framework for HE (EAQFHE).
3. Regional accreditation system (quality based) for academic programmes.
4. Student mobility programme.
5. East African QA Network (EAQAN).

Focus on these priority areas is put on the student-centric policy approach, while being compliant with legal and policy frameworks developed in East Africa to harmonise and ensure the quality of higher education and recognition of qualifications obtained in the region and to facilitate mobility of learners and skilled labour force across the region.





Thematic workshop

# Micro-credentials for a future-proof higher education system from the EHEA and global perspectives

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**"Micro-credentials for higher education institutions. Approaches developed in the EHEA using peer support"**

**Elisa Petrucci**

*CIMEA, Italy*

**Experience from the Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework**

**Gunta Kinta**

*Academic Information Centre (AIC), Latvia*

**Micro-credentials in South-East Asia region. The experience of MICROCASA project "White Paper: Action Plan for Micro-credentials adoption in HE of SEA"**

**Radziah Adam**

*Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia*

The session was aimed at sharing insights from the regional and global perspective on the topic of micro-credentials and alternative pathways.

The publication “[Micro-credentials for higher education institutions. Approaches developed in the EHEA using peer support](#)” was developed in the framework of the TPG-LRC CoRE project. The theoretical basis for the publication was the Rome Communiqué asking to “explore how and to what extent these smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials, can be defined, developed, implemented and recognised by our institutions using EHEA tools”.

The document represents a hands-on tool to support HEIs in the process of designing, implementing, awarding and recognising quality-assured micro-credentials. “The added value of this document is the joint reflections carried out among the different Thematic Peer Groups, bringing together different perspectives of qualifications framework and ECTS, recognition and QA”.

It is based on the rationale that the provision and recognition of micro-credentials are two sides of the same coin, meaning that designing micro-credentials based on the Bologna tools and supported by existing good practices will also facilitate their recognition.

The definition of micro-credentials included in the Council Recommendation (Council of EU, 2022) served as a point of reference to guide the journey from the design to the recognition of a micro-credential through the following questions:

1. What is a micro-credential?
2. Why offer micro-credentials?
3. What type of micro-credential?
4. What to take into consideration when defining learning outcomes of a micro-credential?
5. What to take into consideration when assigning a Qualifications Framework (QF) level and defining the workload of a micro-credential?
6. How to build a micro-credential around the learner?
7. How to quality-assure micro-credentials?
8. How to support the recognition of a micro-credential?
9. How can digital solutions support the portability of micro-credentials?

**The contribution of the Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework and ECTS (TPG A) to the publication on micro-credentials was presented as a good example of how cooperation in the Bologna process could push positive approaches towards topics that are high in the recognition agenda.** The work of the TPG A was supported by the QUATRA project, which also contributed to the reflections towards the drafting of the Tirana Communiqué. “Recommendations resulting from the analysis were targeted to national authorities for what concerns system-level, to higher education on a more practical level and to QA agencies for contributing to definition of standards, principles and procedures. What we mainly concluded is that it is good to regulate micro-credentials, but we should pay attention to not overregulate them, as one of their preferable characteristics is their flexibility.”

The “[White Paper: Action Plan for Micro-credentials adoption in Higher Education for Southeast Asian countries](#)” was realised in the framework of the MICROCASA project, involving institutions from South East Asia. While the policy landscape results quite diverse across SEA countries, QA remains a common challenge in the region. The White paper included some recommendations for adoption:

- to develop regional cooperation for recognition.
- Utilise digital platforms and blockchain for verification.
- Establish a unified definition of micro-credentials.
- Strengthen QA mechanisms.
- Foster collaboration between universities and industry.

Finally, the need for strengthening national policies on micro-credentials, and expanding the adoption across universities and industries was stressed. The engagement of key stakeholders for long-term sustainability emerges as a key element, contributing to further research and collaboration opportunities.





Thematic workshop

## Digitalisation for a future-proof higher education system from the EHEA and global perspectives

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### Digitalisation and AI in education: the Council of Europe's Perspective

**Alessandra Ricci Ascoli**

*Council of Europe*

### TPG-LRC CoRE publication on digitalisation

**Aleksandra Zhivkovikj**

*European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)*

### The South African national experience

**Makhapa Makhafola**

*South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), South Africa*

The session was aimed at sharing insights from the regional and global perspective on the topic of digitalisation.

The work that the CoE is carrying out in relation to digitalisation was presented in the perspective of developing and promoting digital citizenship education. The recent [Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence](#) promoted by the CoE is the first legally binding document on artificial intelligence and complements existing standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. “It sets broad commitments for the states: while it does not regulate technology as such, it covers the activities of public and private actors that might have an impact on human dignity, non-discrimination, privacy and data protection, transparency and oversight, etc. The provisions are general, and it is up to the states to adopt and maintain measures to implement them”. Risk and impact assessment on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, when designing, developing and deploying artificial intelligence (AI) systems, are crucial. The way forward foresees to go more in depth into the implications of the use of digital solutions and artificial intelligence to, among other aspects, support the recognition of qualifications and counter education fraud, in a constant dialogue with all the interested parties.

The upcoming publication “[Mapping digital tools for recognition in the EHEA. Practices from peer support approach](#)”<sup>5</sup>, was developed in the framework of the TPG-LRC CoRE project. The publication presents the results of the Peer Learning Activities on digital solutions for the recognition agenda, which were organised as part of project activities and involved TPG B members. The PLAs were focused on the three phases of recognition process: input, throughput and output. The publication left some open points to support further discussions, especially on “data standards, models and elements used in the initiatives on digitalisation”, as well as on digital solutions for diploma supplement.

South Africa is considered a mobile-first economy with a high percentage of internet users, accessing the web through mobile devices, and government initiatives in place on digital skills aimed at bridging the digital gap. Moreover, the country presents emerging tech hubs, thriving startup ecosystems in fintech, health tech and edtech sectors; efforts are carried out in promoting the use of digital identity. “There are many challenges though, such as limited rural access, digital literacy, policy implementation”. Concerning the digitalisation process and the use of artificial intelligence in education, there is a growing trend in interest and in integration experiences, aimed at improving administrative efficiency and bridging educational gaps. “Our greater challenge at national level is linked to data management, as there is the need to gather information from a variety of sources. Regarding qualifications, we have a record database for national learners, where all qualifications are included. All data is structured in an integrated system in the NQF Management Information System (NQFMIS)”.

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<sup>5</sup> The document was published on 31 March 2025, after the final conference. The presentation on the publication has been made based on the state of the art of reflections at the drafting stage and the structure that has been agreed within the project consortium.

Thematic workshop

## **Evolving tools and practices for a future-proof higher education system from the EHEA and global perspectives**

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**State of the art of the European degree at policy level**

**Yann-Maël Bideau**

*DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture,  
European Commission*

**TPG-LRC CoRE publication on European Degree**

**Emanuela Gitto**

*CIMEA, Italy*



The session was aimed at sharing insights on the State of the art of the European degree as an evolving initiative at the European level.

The state of the art of the European degree was presented, starting from the obstacles that are currently in place to develop joint programmes in higher education, among these: the lack of full implementation of Bologna tools. In this context, “the European degree should come as something to overcome these obstacles: if the European degree is enabled by national legislations as a common framework that can be used by EU countries for the design of joint programmes and award of joint degrees, most of the current barriers would be overcome”. When it comes to implementation, both the European label or European degree options are on the table, as discussions with Member States are ongoing. “The label could be awarded to joint programmes or degrees, as a great branding tool, act as an incentive for the removal of obstacles in national legislations and as a means to valorise students’ learning outcomes. A label is not a legislative tool, as a result only the implementation of a European degree as a type of joint degree enabled by National Qualification Frameworks could have a direct impact on the removal of obstacles”. The identification of good practices has been considered among the next steps to support the implementation of a European degree.

Reflections aired among the TPG-LRC CoRE consortium, especially linked to the contributions of ENIC-NARICs to the discussion on European degree, in the perspective of its definition, once established, have been included in the upcoming publication “[The European degree from a recognition perspective. A look at policies and pilot experiences](#)”<sup>7</sup>, to be published within the TPG-LRC CoRE project. The remaining open questions, together with some elements to reflect on in the recognition perspective, were also presented, namely the need for terminology clarifications and how the existing QA tools will apply to European degree.

<sup>7</sup> The document was published on 31 March 2025, after the final conference. The presentation on the publication has been made based on the state of art of reflections at the drafting stage and the structure that has been agreed within the project consortium.







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More information can be found at  
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